Music at Convocation Hall

Music at Convocation Hall I

Late Beethoven Sonatas

Joachim Segger, piano

Friday, January 19, 2007
7:15 pm *Pre-Concert Introduction*
by **Marnie Giesbrecht**
Main floor, Convocation Hall
8:00 pm *Concert*

Convocation Hall

Arts Building
University of Alberta

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

Program

Ludwig Van Beethoven
(1770-1827)

Sonata in A Major, Op 101 (1816)

I Etwas lebhaft und mit der innigsten Empfindung: Allegretto ma non troppo
II Lebhaft. Marschmässig: Vivace alla marcia
III Langsam und sehnsuchtsvoll: Adagio, ma non troppo, con affetto
IV Geschwind, doch nicht zu sehr, und mit Entschlossenheit: Allegro

Sonata in A-Flat Major, Op 110 (1821)

I Moderato cantabile molto espressivo
II Allegro molto
III Adagio ma non troppo; Arioso dolente;
Fuga: Allegro ma non troppo;
L'istesso tempo di arioso:
L'istesso Tempo della fuga

Intermission

Sonata in C Minor, Op 111 (1822)

I Maestoso; Allegro con brio ed appassionato
II Arietta; Adagio molto semplice e cantabile

In honour of Stewart and Julie Hamilton,
for their donation of a beautiful Steinway grand piano
to the Department in 2005-2006.

Program Notes
by Emily Grieve

Beethoven's late piano sonatas, written between 1816 and 1822, reveal evidence of a stylistic change in his compositional career and an emotional crisis in his personal life. Around 1812 Beethoven suffered a serious depression linked to his realization that he would probably never marry and have a family. Despite the success of Fidelio and other compositions in 1814, domestic problems plagued Beethoven throughout the ensuing year. 1815 brought the death of his brother, which began the fierce legal battle between Beethoven and his sister-in-law for the custody of his nephew, Karl. Beethoven's yearning for a wife and a family was focused into his desire for full custody of his nephew and his attempts to provide a good domestic situation for the boy. Unfortunately, Beethoven's well meaning attempts to gain sole custody of Karl ended tragically. The stress of the custody battle depleted Beethoven's energy and caused his depression to worsen. With the exception of the Sonata in A Major, Op 101 and the song cycle *An die Ferne Geliebte*, which were written in 1816, Beethoven composed very few major works between 1815 and 1818, preoccupying himself with settings of folksongs and some other minor works for profit. These years were also difficult for Beethoven due to his worsening health and increasing deafness; around 1818 he had to start relying on written conversations. To make matters worse, by 1818, the turmoil of the Napoleonic wars caused Beethoven to lose many of his aristocratic friends and patrons, as well as the wide public audience he had enjoyed for his earlier pieces. Despite the frustration and loneliness Beethoven must have felt during this difficult time, he gradually recovered from his lapse in creativity with the composition of the Hammerklavier sonata. In 1819, Beethoven began writing the immense and spiritually powerful *Missa Solemnis*, and by 1820 he had acquired an ambitious workload. In May of 1820 Beethoven proposed to write three piano sonatas in three months for a Berlin publisher. He did not complete the sonatas in this time frame and composed Op 109, Op 110 and Op. 111 over the next two years. These three pieces, Beethoven's final piano sonatas, are among the greatest works for solo piano.

The crisis Beethoven overcame to write the late piano sonatas was intellectual as well as emotional. New, younger composers including Schubert, and Berlioz began producing innovative pieces in which the fundamental sonata structure of classical music was drawn into question. Although Beethoven had revolutionized sonata form during his heroic period in the early years of the nineteenth century, younger, avant-garde composers were going in totally new directions. Thus, Beethoven struggled to find a different approach to style so he would not be left behind. Inspired by the romantic concept of universal brotherhood, Beethoven adapted the simple lyricism of the folksongs he arranged into his late compositions, providing an intimate form of human communication through simple melody. Also adding to the directness of Beethoven's late works are the poignant sections of instrumental recitative and arioso, also inspired by vocal music. Beethoven also looked to music of the past for inspiration, particularly the contrapuntal works of Palestrina, J.S. Bach, and Handel. The fugal sections of Beethoven's late pieces helped him to again reinvent sonata form by providing new approaches to thematic development and tonality. Another structural innovation contained in Beethoven's late pieces is his reinterpretation of

variation form where each variation evolves out of the previous one and is highly original, rather than being merely an ornamentation of the original theme. Overall, Beethoven's late works are much more introspective than the works of his earlier periods. The sonatas composed between 1816 and 1822 contain the quiet maturity of a man who was forced to come to terms with hardship and loneliness. Unlike the vigorous heroic nature of Beethoven's earlier works, his late works convey a sense of spiritual transcendence through the religious majesty of their fugues, which reach beyond the traditional concept of sonata form; the intimacy of their lyrical melodies, which reach beyond the boundaries of communication to move every soul universally; and the speech-like character of their instrumental phrases, which reach beyond the boundaries of instrumental technique and attempt to acquire direct human speech.

Sonata in A Major, Op 101

The piano sonata in A Major, Op 101 was written in 1816; it is the first of the five sonatas that are included in Beethoven's late period. Op 101 contains many lyrical, folk-like melodies, especially in the first movement, which is marked *Etwas lebhaft und mit innigsten Empfindung* (somewhat lively with tender emotion). The first phrase of the opening movement presents thematic material that is important throughout the entire sonata. Its initial rising motive seems to be a heartfelt invocation that is answered with a similar descending gesture. Beethoven deviates from traditional tonality in this sonata. The opening thematic group appears to be in the dominant of E major rather than the expected tonic of A major, which is not strongly articulated until the return of the secondary thematic group at the end of the piece. More remote keys are visited in the development section, which manipulates material from the opening melody. Beethoven also uses the sparkling sonorities in the high register of the piano to add colour to his musical ideas. After the recapitulation, a brief Coda fragments the melody, which gradually rises to a peaceful conclusion. In contrast to the traditional slow sonata movements of the classical period, the second movement of Op 101 is a lively march. Noble dotted notes pervade the melody of the march, which is divided into A and B sections. As in the first movement, Beethoven makes ingenious use of tone colour, especially in the B section in which gentle lyricism adds contrast. The march is followed by a trio that opens with an imitation of a horn call. The flowing, melodious eighth notes of the trio provide a warm repose before the reprise of the energetic march.

The finale opens with a slow introduction that could also serve as the sonata's slow inner movement. Beethoven directs the pianist to play this section *Langsam und sehnsuchtvoll* (slowly and full of longing). The expressive figurations are reminiscent of vocal recitative or arioso as the piano cries out plaintively to the listener. After an almost operatic cadenza, the melody from the beginning of the first movement is reintroduced, but it is interrupted by expressive pauses, making it seem like a found recollection of this beautiful theme. The memory of the beginning soon grows energetic and joyful as it leads into the merry contrapuntal theme of the finale. A grand fugue serves as the development section in this movement and introduces some chromaticism and dramatic tension. Beethoven again makes expressive use of the sparkling high register of the piano in the recapitulation of the joyful, contrapuntal theme. As the Coda brings the sonata to an end, the music is fragmented as the melodies

seem to disappear into nothing before a powerful A major arpeggio brings the piece to its conclusion.

Sonata in A-Flat Major, Op 110
In his penultimate sonata Beethoven completely reinvents sonata form. The first movement seems more like a fantasia than a traditional sonata form. It begins with an expressive, cantabile primary theme that suddenly blossoms into quick, light arpeggiations of the tonic chord. These contrasting melodic and arpeggiated ideas are developed throughout the rest of the sonata, and the thematic elaboration continues into the recapitulation as the primary theme is varied upon repetition; however, its simple lyricism finally reappears in the final phrase of the movement, bringing it to a peaceful close.

Like the second movement of Op 101, the second movement of this sonata is also energetic and vigorous. Beethoven uses the difference between soft and loud dynamics and the low and high registers of the piano to add colour and build excitement. An inner section featuring flowing eighth notes contrasts with the chordal outer sections. Following the final repetition of the chordal section a Coda featuring accented chords punctuated by entire bars of rest leads into a modulation to the relative major key and a gradual slowing and quietening in preparation for the ensuing finale.

The final movement of Op 110 contains several sections, the first of which acts like a slow introduction. This slow section is very operatic in character; it imitates expressive recitative and arioso on the piano, setting the mood for the ensuing lyrical section that resembles an instrumental aria. Beethoven marked this section *Klagender Gesang* (Song of Lament), indicating its tragic, yet cantabile character. The lament seems to fade into darkness as the melody slows and descends into the lowest register of the piano; however, the ensuing fugue begins slowly in a low register and gradually builds upwards as if it is rising out of the darkness. The optimism of the fugue grows and becomes more lively until it is interrupted by the return of the *Klagender Gesang*, which is now elaborated and punctuated with rests that resemble plaintive sobs. The lament again sinks into the darkness of the low register, but this time it is answered by the entry of the fugue from above. In the higher register the fugal theme seems to evoke spiritual transcendence as the darkness of the lament is finally dispelled. The fugue again grows more lively and flows into an arpeggiated section that recalls the melody and atmosphere of the first movement and brings the sonata to a triumphant close.

Sonata in C Minor, Op 111
Beethoven may have been inspired by compositions of his past when he wrote the C Minor first movement of his final sonata. The serious, majestic mood of the slow introduction resembles several C Minor sketches he made in his early years in Vienna. The fusion of the past and present in Op 111 parallels the reflective, yet transcendental mood of the entire sonata, especially the theme and variations of the second movement.

After the introduction, which is reminiscent of a Baroque overture in its noble dotted notes, a low, rumbling tremolo builds up to the entry of the primary theme

in grim, menacing octaves. The rest of the first movement seems to be constructed out of elaborations of this theme; although a gentler, more lyrical melody is subsequently presented, the dark main theme soon returns towards the end of the exposition. Throughout the development section, manipulations of the main theme are presented. Beethoven uses counterpoint and fugal entries to develop the theme as well as contrast in tone color, dynamics and register. After the recapitulation of the original melodies, a brief Coda presents a soaring, passionate melody that leads towards a modulation to C Major in preparation for the theme and variations.

The second movement of Op 111 is an example of Beethoven's innovations in variation form. From the simple theme evolve original, emotionally expressive variations that seem to transcend towards the spiritual. Beethoven labeled the theme as an Arietta, which reflects its tender cantabile nature. It is incredible how this theme seems to evoke emotions such as reflection, yearning, resignation and finally acceptance in its simple rising and falling melodic contour. In the first variation the tempo increases slightly, and the flowing accompaniment brings heightened movement. The second variation introduces the rhythmic pattern of a long melodic note followed by a short one that predominates this variation and the next. The ensuing third variation is a joyful outburst that features quick 32^{nd} notes, which bring heightened rhythmic complexity and exuberance and give it an improvisatory feel. In the fourth variation, Beethoven deviates from the expected form of those which preceded it; instead of repeating each section of the theme, he now adds further elaboration. The melody of the theme is stripped away and only the chordal outlines are left in low chords and tremolos; the theme is then varied in the contrasting high register with light, delicate articulations. In the final variation the theme is extended to include several contrasting sections beginning with a tender return to the tempo and basic motivic elements of the original theme in the high register accompanied by sparkling trills. The music soon gains momentum as the accompaniment becomes quicker and more energetic, building towards the conclusion of the sonata, which ends with delicate, high sonorities that seem to reach beyond the boundaries of the instrument. At the conclusion of the second movement a short phrase featuring the melodic ideas of the original theme brings the movement full circle, suggesting completeness and spiritual reconciliation.

Joachim Segger has amazed and moved audiences with his solo piano playing since his recital debut in Convocation Hall, University of Alberta, at the age of fourteen. The youngest student to be awarded the Performer's Certificate at the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, New York, he made his Carnegie Recital Hall debut after winning the New York Canadian Women's Club Competition in his final undergraduate year.

A consummate musician, Segger's musical career embraces and excels as pianist, organist, improviser, arranger and teacher. He is sought after and acclaimed nationally and internationally as performer and clinician and has toured Canada, the US, Europe and South Africa as soloist, as Duo Majoya with Marnie Giesbrecht, as pianist for the Pre-Tenors and in a duo with saxophonist Charles Stolte. Current projects include creating and publishing Duo Majoya's organ and piano arrangements.

Educated at the Eastman School of Music, Rochester New York and University of Alberta, major teachers include Ernesto Lejano, Helmut Brauss, Hugh Bancroft, Menahem Pressler, Kurt Neumuller and the legendary Cecile Genhart (Eastman School of Music).

Dr Segger is Professor of Music (Piano) at The King's University College, Edmonton, Alberta and Adjunct Professor of Piano and Organ (Improvisation) at the University of Alberta. The recipient of numerous awards including Canada Council and Alberta Heritage, in 2005 he received the Province of Alberta Gold Medal for the innovative work and international profile of Duo Majoya, Joachim Segger and Marnie Giesbrecht. Segger and Giesbrecht co-direct the music at First Presbyterian Church, Edmonton and are co-chairs of Windspiration: Edmonton Organ Festival and national convention of the Royal Canadian College of Organists, July 30 to Aug. 2, 2007.

Information on Joachim's solo piano CD and Duo Majoya CD's can be seen at http://www.arktos.ca and http://www.majoya.com.

Upcoming Events

January

21 Sunday, 3:00 pm
Visiting Artist Recital
Richard Raymond, piano
Works by Ludwig van Beethoven, Franz Liszt, Frédéric Chopin and Julius Reubke
Admission: $15/stud/sen, $20/adult

22 Monday, 12:00 pm
Noon Hour Organ Recital
with organists
Allison Wonnick, John Scott, Philip Chow and Siu Ling Chiu
Works by Buxtehude, Couperin, Bach and Reger
Free admission

23 Tuesday, 3:30-5:00 pm
Piano Masterclass
Visiting Artist Richard Raymond
Free admission

26 Friday, 8:00 pm
Music at Convocation Hall II
Guillaume Tardif, violin
Roger Admiral, piano
Paganini 24 Caprices, Op 1
(arranged with piano
by Gallois-Montbrun)
Admission: $15/stud/sen, $20/adult

28 Sunday, 8:00 pm
Master of Music Recital
Siu Ling Chiu, organist/conductor
Doctor of Music Recital
in Performance (Organ)
and Choral Conducting
JS Bach, Bolcom, Max Reger
with the U of A Recital Choir
Haydn, Brahms, Cabena, and Yeung, Pak Lung
Free admission

February

2 Friday, 8:00 pm
Kilburn Memorial Concert
at the Winspear Centre for Music
Visiting Artist Paul Jacobs, organ
Virtuosic organ music on the Davis Concert Organ by Johann Sebastian Bach, Cesar Franck, Max Reger, Olivier Messiaen and Julius Reubke
Admission: $15/stud/sen, $20/adult

3 Saturday, 10:30 am
Organ Masterclass
Visiting Artist Pau Jacobs, organ
Free admission

3 Saturday, 8:00 pm
World Music on Stage
Admission: $10/stud/sen, $15/adult
For more information, contact The Centre for Ethnomusicology, 492-0274

4 Sunday, 8:00 pm
University Symphony Orchestra
Tanya Prochazka, Conductor
Beethoven *Symphony No 3 in E Flat, Op 55 (Eroica)*
Brahms Symphony No 4
in E Minor, Op 98
Admission: $10/stud/sen, $15/adult

5 Monday, 12:00 pm
Music at Noon, Convocation Hall
Student Recital Series
Featuring students from the Department of Music
Free admission

Please donate to Campus Food Bank

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Unless otherwise indicated
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Please note: All concerts and events are subject to change without notice. Please call 492-0601 to confirm concerts (after office hours a recorded message will inform you of any changes to our schedule).